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ABSTRACT

Developments in communications technology should become a major concern of minorities (native Americans and Americans of African, Asian, and Hispanic racial or ethnic origin). Although minorities are disillusioned with broadcast television because television decision makers have not been sensitive to minority needs, they have shown interest recently in cable television as well as in other communication technologies--satellites, computers, fibre optics, and lasers. In order to become involved in communications on the research and policy making levels, students must be educated in communication technology, and black colleges should recognize that telecommunications can lead to a new way of generating revenue while leading to economic and community development. (JH)

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ETHNIC MINORITIES AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

BY

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Marion Hayes-Hull

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In any discussion of minorities and the forces that affect their lives, one must begin with a definition of the term "minority". In my presentation I will use the term ethnic minority only in the racial sense. My definition was adopted from The Report of the Advisory Panel on Essentials for Effective Minority Programming, on which I served for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. I use " 'Minority' to refer to a racial or ethnic group, which, by virtue of its cultural and ethnic identity, is subjected to the disadvantages inherent in a position of inequality in the American social structure." Specifically, I am talking about Native Americans, Americans of African, Asian and Hispanic racial or ethnic origin.

How has the emergence of new telecommunications systems affected these minorities? I believe the effectiveness of any communications medium in controlling or regulating the lives of minority people is now generally recognized. If you remember the Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, it describes the effect of media on minorities by saying, "Television is the formal news source most relied upon in the ghetto. According to one report, more than 75% of one group sampled regularly watched television from 5 to 7 p.m., daily during the dinner hours.

If we look at any national surveys or polls, we see that Blacks, in particular, tend to regard radio and television as the most credible source for information and news.

One evening last fall the six o'clock network evening news reported that there was going to be a drastic paper shortage, and toilet paper, in particular, would be scarce. For the next few days, I am sure you remember, the shelves of super markets were virtually empty of toilet paper. Minority housewives were convinced that whatever Walter Cronkite said was gospel.

However, I am beginning to see that larger numbers of minorities are becoming more alert in understanding the power of the media and hopefully are beginning to realize the difference between being informed and being manipulated. This is progress. But, I believe, it's time minorities became concerned with the current development of communications technology, which means we must learn how the media can be used to communicate both inside and outside our communities in order to survive. We, as minorities need to become knowledgeable of all the new technology that can be of educational, economic, and social benefit to all disadvantaged people. Many of us who have been involved over the years in the mass media, feel there is no hope for minorities in broadcasting, for the decision makers within these industries have never been sensitive to minority needs. In this respect, I personally feel the U.S. Riot Commission's Report is as applicable today as it was in 1967. In attempting to define reasons for the mass civil disturbances by Blacks, the

Commission Report stated, and I quote, "Most Newspaper articles and most television programs ignore the fact that an appreciable part of their audience is black. The world that television and newspapers offer to their black audience is almost totally white, in both appearance and attitude. Our evidence shows that the so-called white press is at best mistrusted and at worst held in contempt by many black Americans. Far too often, the press acts and talks about Negroes as if Negroes do not read the newspapers or watch television, give birth, marry, die and go to P.T.A. meetings. Some newspapers and stations are beginning to make efforts to fill this void, but they still have a long way to go." End of quote. I feel this evaluation eight years later, is still disturbingly accurate.

In the area of employment, the picture is very similar. Although recent statistics show that the employment of minorities is on the increase at both commercial and noncommercial television stations, there is evidence of false reporting and belief that some commercial stations are misclassifying jobs. This conclusion was drawn recently as part of the findings of the United Church of Christ's Office of Communications. Their third annual employment survey of broadcast stations indicated there was an increase in full-time minority employees at commercial stations. Specifically, minority employment rose from 11 percent to 12 percent. In fact, the report showed that new minority employment at commercial stations has increased to 72 percent since 1971. At noncommercial stations employment rose

to 12 percent. However, at both commercial and noncommercial stations, most of the increases were in upper level jobs. Ironically however, the same commercial stations that reported an increase in management positions, reported a sharp decline in low-level, blue collar jobs. Thus, the question is raised, are broadcasters simply re-classifying low-level workers and changing their title to higher categories. If this is true, then minorities are really being maintained at the same job, with the same low salaries. In other words, are we being misled into believing minorities are moving faster upward in the broadcasting industry than is actually true?

The United Church of Christ report also found that despite seemingly improved minority hiring overall, a substantial number of stations are still not in compliance with the fair employment standards established by the Federal Communications Commission. For example: of 647 commercial stations filing reports, 131 reported no minorities in full-time positions. Additionally, 175 stations reported no minorities in upper level job categories. The records for noncommercial stations are even poorer. I am sure by now all of you are aware that the FCC refused to renew the license of the Alabama Educational TV Commission to operate all 8 ETV stations in Alabama. The action was taken because of proven charges of racial discrimination in employment and programming. This was the first time the FCC has decided to take such action.

For these reasons and many more, minorities are becoming disillusioned with broadcast television and are beginning to turn to other telecommunications systems to meet their needs. Thus, over the past three years there has been a great interest in cable. Minorities feel it is a revolutionary new communications medium for a variety of non-broadcast services, as well as entertainment. For the first time cable permits minorities to actually own a communications system. In fact, major minority organizations, such as the National Urban League, the National Black Media Coalition, American Indian Press Association and others, have established study groups to investigate the potential use of cable technology for the economic, social, and political betterment of their constituents. At the present time there are 25 minority held cable franchises in the U.S.---6 of these systems are already in operation. Whereas there is only one minority owned broadcast TV station, in St. Croix, V.I. Also, out of 7,000 radio stations, only 33 are minority owned. So you see cable in its short history is making faster progress than any other form of the electronic media. However, we must look beyond cable to newer emerging communications technologies. Again, we find almost no involvement by minorities. For example: last year the most powerful communications satellite ever sent aloft was launched---the ATS-6. The purpose of the satellite was to conduct health, education and telecommunications experiments in strategic locations in the United States. Sites of the

experiment were the Appalachian region, Alaska, and the Rocky Mountain states. However, persons in charge of the operations were almost all non-minorities. They included persons affiliated with NASA, HEW, National Education Association administrators, faculty from the University of Kentucky, plus others along the same lines - yet, the target audience for the experiments were for the most part minorities, or the disadvantaged. This is typical of the many experimental projects that are being designed and demonstrated across the country with public money. Even though educational institutions, as do other sectors of society, suffer from money problems, government and private foundations are still aggressively continuing to support the development of educational technology. The National Science Foundation, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, HEW and private foundations such as Lilly, Markle and Rockefeller are still placing an emphasis on research and design of innovative communications systems. Yesterday I attended an invitation only meeting at the FCC. The purpose was to assess the current educational uses of cable TV. Of 25 researchers from across the country, I was the only minority. As a result of the meeting the FCC, NIE, and HEW announced they will consider jointly sponsoring a major research study on the impact of cable on education. The persons at yesterday's meeting were asked to suggest guidelines for the project which will be circulated with the Request for Proposals. I believe there are a number of minority institutions capable of conducting such studies.

It is not enough to just start Radio, TV, and cable systems, minorities need to be involved at the policy making level.

In my opinion, the greatest hope, at the present time for the survival of minority education is not only to become aware of the technology, but also to contribute to its development. Too often, we as minorities, tend to adopt, belatedly, systems without any regard to the effectiveness of the systems in meeting our needs. We seldom consider the impact such systems will have on our people or the cost-effectiveness of such systems. We need to be making decisions on what our people need and want.

We also need to begin exposing our students to the new method of learning and the new tools being designed: Computers, lasers, fibre optics, satellites, etc. We need to tell them of the new demands of the labor market and most important, the need to begin adequately preparing for the changing requirements in occupational skills. I urge all of you to read the latest issue of Black Enterprise Magazine and the article dealing with the disturbingly low number of minority engineers there are. Most of the black colleges are still producing primarily teachers that are equipped to teach only in traditional classrooms while at the same time the predominantly white colleges are preparing their students for open learning programs, satellite oriented classrooms, and curriculums designed for individualized instructions. Moreover, the predominantly white colleges that are most engaged in technology have the smallest percentage of minority students enrolled.

Let me give you just a sampling of the kinds of telecommunications educational projects that are currently in operation, and an idea of the input by minorities in these programs.

1. The University of Kentucky is presently serving as the resource center for the Appalachian Educational Satellite Project. Its primary mission is to produce television programs that can be provided over the ATS-6 satellite. The programs are being used to offer graduate education courses to teachers in remote areas. There are less than a dozen minority seminar participants in the project.
 2. Last year a National Conference on open learning in Higher Education was sponsored by the State University of Nebraska. Nearly 400 educators from across the United States met in Lincoln, Nebraska to explore the potential of using technology to reach the adult American learning population. Here again there was very little minority participation.
 3. Also, last year a conference on Cable Television and the University was held in Dallas, Texas. Billed as invitational, the conference was geared to university presidents and their top administrators. Less than a dozen minority institutions were represented. Dr. Van Allen, Executive Director of TACTIC was the lone minority program participant.
- This coming June the University of Wisconsin is sponsoring a conference on University Applications of Satellite and Cable Technology.

The purpose of the conference is to foster discussion on uses of satellite and broadband cable systems that can be used for higher education and public service purpose. From initial contact I have had with minority educators, most are not aware of this upcoming conference. There are many other examples I could use, but I think you see my point.

To summarize, it is essential for minorities in higher education to become aware of the potential of new communications systems. In particular, minority educators will have to become involved both at the local and national level in meaningful research that will determine how the technology can reach its fullest potential. In other words, we must stop being just consumers, but also become policy makers.

At the Cablecommunications Resource Center we are committed to insuring greater minority involvement in the area of telecommunications through a project we call Telecommunications and Black Colleges, of which I am project director. We are presently prepared to initiate and carry out a coordinated, comprehensive telecommunications research and demonstration program with Black Colleges. Our goal is to prove telecommunications can lead to a new way of generating revenue for the colleges while at the same time leading to economic and community development. We believe black colleges have unique capabilities as educational service providers for their communities - and, because of their acceptance within the minority community, black colleges have a

special opportunity to provide many types of services, such as continuing education, specialized training and outreach programs. They are also capable of designing new social service delivery systems.

CRC has recently embarked on a rural Southern strategy. We believe black colleges and other minority institutions can be the focal point for the development of community controlled, minority owned cable systems throughout the South. There are 70 targeted communities in which cable development will be initiated over the next three years. Most of the communities are located within a 50 mile radius of one or more black colleges.

Communications must not be thought of as a medium for entertainment only, but as a tool for liberating oppressed people. It is a tool for educating minority children and minority adults in America. The education and/or public service to minorities can not be furthered if the standard of middle-class whites are used to measure the value of telecommunications systems.

In closing, I urge you to consider the findings and recommendations of the Congressional Black Caucus. After much testimony and investigation, the Caucus concluded, and I will quote, "The communications media provide the cornerstone of a social system and are a microcosm of the total society. As American society is wracked and torn by racism, it would be folly for Black people to expect that our present communications media are prepared to purvey social justice.

The mass media has had ample chance to change, but has not taken their responsibility to the public seriously enough. The

Congressional Caucus recommends that the following action be taken:

1. Minority communities should form watchdog committees to monitor local media activities and investigate all possible means of utilizing the mass communications media for the maximum benefit of the public.
2. Demand that the total mass communications industry recruit and employ Blacks and minorities at all levels; provide training programs for Blacks and minorities who wish to enter the industry, encouraging journalism schools to play a major part in such programs; and develop programs by which minorities can advance to positions of authority in all phases of the industry.
3. Demand that the electronic media provide the forums by which minorities can determine program content and context to eliminate gross distortion and mis-interpretation of their experience based on white middle-class value judgements. This can be done by promotion of minorities to decision-making positions and by consultation with minorities outside the industry.
4. Use economic and political pressure to obtain for minority publications and minority electronic media a proportionate share of all public and private advertising budgets.
5. The minority media industry and minority media workers should be given full access to information disseminated

at all levels of government. They should have full participation in press briefings and conferences on all governmental levels; inclusion on mailing lists for news releases; or access to whatever means is being utilized to inform the media industry.

6. That means to assure an equitable share of minority ownership of TV and radio stations be established by regulation of the FCC. All too often the sale and transfer of station properties occur without public notification of the community in which the outlet resides" end of quote.

Minorities in this country have spent most of their lives fighting for those freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution. By promoting ethnic pride through telecommunications we can provide an avenue for liberation. We must begin to make communications reflect our reality, or we will continue to simply expound more rhetoric.